

The Sin of Prayerlessness

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"God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23).



It was a critical time in the history of the nation of Israel. They had sinned in asking for a king in order to be like the nations round about them. God had frowned upon their sin by sending thunder and rain. The people confessed their sin and earnestly asked Samuel to pray for them. The response of Samuel to this request is our text: "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." Note the exact statement. He does not say, "God forbid that I should sin against you" but rather, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."

Prayerlessness is not a sin, first of all, against needy men, or unsaved men, or the church, or the servants of the Lord but "against the Lord" Himself.

Why Prayerlessness a Sin?

Let us consider in the first place why prayerlessness is a sin against the Lord. We shall present four reasons. First, it takes lightly the promises of God respecting prayer. The Scriptures teem with promises to those who will pray. For instance, Jn. 14:13, 14 says, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it." When the child of God comes before the Father in the name of Christ, "enclosed in His name," he is promised answer to his prayer to the end that the Father may be glorified. To fail to embrace this promise is to keep back glory from the Father and is sin.

Again, Jn. 15:7 says, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will and it shall be done unto you." To fail to meet these conditions and pray as herein suggested is to keep back our lives from being fruitful and is sin.

James 1:5 says, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." To those who pray for it, God here promises wisdom for living the Christian life. To fail is to live unwisely and to be less than we ought to be for God and is sin.

One further promise in 1 Jn. 5:14, 15, says, "And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have desired of Him." According to this, prayer imparts blessing. It brings forth healing virtue. To fail to heed such a promise is to go forth unblest and is sin. Dr. A. T. Pierson has said, "God has no greater controversy with His people today than this, that with boundless promises to believing prayer there

are so few who actually give themselves unto intercession."

Prayerlessness Robs God

Secondly, prayerlessness is sin because it robs God of fellowship with His children. Our Lord's first lesson in the school of prayer was, and still is, "Enter into thy closet" (Mt. 6:6). The closet is the closed place close by God, where the human spirit waits upon the divine presence and cultivates His acquaintance, fellowship and friendship. We are His children. What earthly parent does not like to talk with his children? So our Father in heaven wants the fellowship of His children. Elijah was bidden first to "Go hide thyself" before he was told to "Go show thyself." To rob God of the fellowship that is His due from His own children is sin.

Thirdly, prayerlessness is sin against the Lord because it is plain disobedience. "Pray without ceasing," says the great apostle writing under inspiration. We cannot make up for the lack of praying by an excess of working. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Lk. 11:9). To refuse God's way of receiving His blessings is disobedience and is sin.

Prayerlessness Withholds Blessing

Finally, on this point, prayerlessness is sin against the Lord because it keeps the blessing of God from being witnessed in His work. It was when the early church prayed that the place was shaken and things began to happen. It was as Jesus was praying that He was transfigured. If the history of all true spiritual advance could be written and read it would be seen that the cause of God advanced as men felt the burden of prayer. Prayer is the greatest privilege of the Christian life, the privilege of audience with God, of commanding His blessing upon ourselves and others, of taking our stand upon His precious promises. To fail to do this is sin in the sight of God.

For Whom Is It a Sin To Cease Praying?

As a second consideration in this matter of the sin of prayerlessness, let us ask the question, **for whom is it a sin to cease praying?** From our text we gain the idea that it is the duty of the child of God to pray for others. That is certainly true. But it is also true that we should pray for ourselves. It is not selfish to do so, nor is it presumption. One of the most beautiful prayers of the Old Testament is that of Jabez found in 1 Chron. 4. It is a prayer for himself. He says, "Oh that Thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that Thine hand might be upon me, and that Thou wouldest keep me from evil, and that it may not grieve me." And so we need to pray for ourselves, to be blessed, to be forgiven, to have a sense of His presence, for purity of heart, for loyalty, that He might enlarge our usefulness. Let

each one of us pray: "Oh that thou wouldst bless me." It is a sin not to pray for ourselves.

Again, it is sinful to cease to pray for the church. Paul in Rom. 1:9 says, "God is my witness, Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers." Samuel said, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you." More than the church needs your money, it needs your prayers. More than it needs a fine organization it needs the prayers of its membership. The church only moves forward toward God as it moves forward upon its knees. **The Lord is a great deal more concerned about how many real intercessors there are in the church than about how many committees and organizations there are.** The latter are a burden unless bathed in the heavenly atmosphere of prayer. To fail to pray for the church, its ministry, its membership, its preaching, its teaching, and its organization is sin and we ought to be less and less guilty of it.

Prayerlessness a Sin Against the Unsaved

It is also a sin to cease praying for the unsaved about us. Dr. R. A. Torrey used to say that every minister and Christian worker should have a prayer list with the heading at the top of the page, "God helping me, I will pray earnestly and work persistently for the conversion of the following persons." Then there should be careful consideration as to the names included on the list. There should be prayer each day without ceasing for the names of those upon the list. You say, "I have been praying for certain persons but my prayer is not answered." Keep on praying. Leave the result with God. George Mueller prayed for two persons for 60 years. At the time of his death they had not yet turned to God. But Mueller said in words of sublime faith, "I have not a doubt that I shall meet them both in heaven; for my heavenly Father would not lay upon my heart a burden of prayer for over three score years, if He had not concerning them purposes of mercy." Let us pray for the unsaved while we may, lest the Lord come to us in our neglect to fail to pray for the unsaved about us. "Lord, lay some soul upon my heart and love that soul through me; and may I nobly do my part to win that soul for thee."

Furthermore, it is sinful to cease praying for the missionaries of the cross and their work. You and I had a part in sending some of them to the field. We are morally bound to uphold them in prayer. We have no right to forsake them thus. Those who have visited foreign mission fields say that it seems as though the very atmosphere is taken possession of by **"the prince of the power of the air."** **We must not let these missionaries battle alone.** James Gilmour, whose rare and radiant spirit so impressed the rude Mongolians, said that, unprayed for, he would feel like a diver in the river bottom with no air to breathe, or like a fireman on a blazing building with no water in his empty hose." Pray for the missionaries of the cross. Pray for the new converts on the fields. Pray for the boards that have the responsibility of guiding missionary work.

Prayer Pays Rich Dividends

We are called to a ministry of prayer. Let us as individuals and churches give ourselves more earnestly to this ministry. It will pay rich dividends. God summons His people to prayer. Who knows? You may meet someone on the streets of glory who will grasp your hand and say, "Thank God, you prayed for me. That's why I am here." The first converts on a certain mission field in Africa were very earnest and regular in their devotions. Each one had a separate spot in the bush to which he went to pray. The paths to these "Bethels" were distinctly marked. When any one began to decline in his prayer habit, it was soon manifest to his fellows. They would remind him of his duty by saying, "Brother, the grass grows on your path yonder."

Let us beware lest, in these busy days, we let the grass grow on the path that leads to our "Bethel" of prayer. "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you."